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United States Senate
COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS & ENTREPRENEURSHIP
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6350

March 19, 2003

Ms. Marilyn Carlson Nelson
Chair
National Women's Business Council
409 Third Street, S.W., Suite 210
Washington, D.C. 20024

Dear Marilyn:

Thank you for the invitation to speak at your March 20, 2003, Women's Roundtable. I regret that scheduling conflicts will not permit me to attend, but I did want to convey my support and interest in your Roundtable.

I applaud the work that the National Women's Business Council (NWBC), and the other organizations represented at the roundtable, have produced in the past. I am pleased to see that you are bringing all of your resources and expertise together to review and plan research and data collection on women-owned businesses. As you contemplate future research initiatives, I offer several suggestions for your consideration.

First, contract bundling is an issue that many women business owners have raised as a major concern. In my hearing this week before the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, I heard clearly the government's need to achieve efficiencies through the bundling of contracts, but I also heard the message delivered for women-owned small businesses by Women Impacting in Public Policy that women-owned small businesses deserve opportunities to compete for government contracts. Perhaps it is time to look at the Women's Equity in Contracting Act (P.L. 106-554), which sought to strengthen contracting opportunities for women-owned businesses. In addition, I urge you to review the best practices of those Federal agencies that are helping women gain access to procurement opportunities.

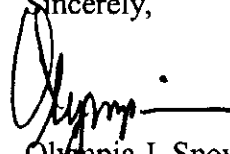
A second consideration would be that the NWBC look at the success stories of women who have used the training and technical assistance offered through the Women's Business Center Program overseen by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). These centers seem to offer a great opportunity, or laboratory, to explore and test ways to serve women entrepreneurs better and what policy changes we need to consider to improve the program.

Lastly, I am interested in women in manufacturing. There are hundreds of manufacturing firms across the country owned and operated by women. A study on the remarkable paths they have chosen would serve us well in efforts to develop programs and services to encourage more women to enter manufacturing. In this sector of the economy, wealth is created by developing

and producing products for the marketplace, and that translates into important jobs for our communities. Such a study would be helpful to women with the talent for innovation and those with manufacturing and engineering skills.

Again, I applaud the work that you have done in the past and that you are coming together to plan for future undertakings. I look forward to a continuing dialogue with the NWBC as we move forward through the SBA reauthorization process, and I assure you that one of my primary roles as Chair of the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship is to create the best possible environment for small businesses to grow and flourish.

Sincerely,



Olympia J. Snowe
Chair

Great to see you recently —! Looking forward to working with you as the Council —!